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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF SUFISM IN THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION, MOBILIZATION AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF THE BARELWI MOVEMENT IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT: This article intends to analyze the forms of political activism of the Barelwi movement, one specific Sufism oriented religious movement rooted in the 19th century, which has gradually politicized through Pakistani history. It has played a widely ignored role in the politics of Pakistan, may it be in party politics, social movements, or through the islamization of society. There are today about forty Barelwi organizations differently located on a scale of politicization, protest and radicalization.
These "neo Sufi orders" have constructed a distinct Sufi identity and evolved different strategies to defend their version of Islam and fight for an Islamic State, an endeavor which they call the system of the Prophet (*Nizam-e Mustafa*). The organizational form they adopted is a mixture of a Sufi order, an activist association and for some, a political party. In the framework of the "War against terror", mainly targeting their more reformist doctrinal challengers, the Barelwi presence in the public sphere has increased. The different groups of the movement have organized many conferences and demonstrations aiming both at denouncing the "talibanization" of Pakistan and at reasserting the role of Sufis in the promotion of an Islam of "peace, love and tolerance" in contemporary Pakistan. Paradoxically, this movement has also undergone a process of radicalization, thus blurring the lines between peaceful activism and violent direct action.

KEYWORDS: Sufism, Islamism, identity politics, mobilization, activism, Pakistan

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1. Introduction

Since its inception, Pakistan, created in 1947 in the name of Islam, has always been an arena of a heated competition concerning the "assets of salvation" (Max Weber). In its bid to instrumentalize the religious reference to build a modern State, Pakistan, long before the Iranian revolution of 1979, was already a "paradigm of Islamic revivalism » (Esposito 1987, ix). This country is a political laboratory eloquently demonstrating that there is no such thing as an "Islamic essence" leading to a single interpretation of dogma and which might serve as an independent variable determining the nature of political debates or the morphology of the State. Because of its symbolic monopoly, the religious reference plays the role of a "natural" ideological resource from the State or against it, and operates in the mode of a "nationalist discourse » (Blom 2002, 100). Indeed, the mobilization of religious referents concerns both State and non State actors, political action from « the top down » and from « the bottom up », social conservatism as well as protest action, hailing from both Islamist groups and Sufi groups. The omnipresence of the Islamic reference on the Pakistani political scene as well as the fight for the monopoly of its interpretation have indeed generated a "fragmentation of authority" (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, 59) and thus a struggle between multiple actors appropriating religious symbols to define "real Islam". Far from being a monolith, Islam covers a wide and often contradictory spectrum of practices and beliefs. Within the broad pool of resources which "Islam" is, Sufism, as the mystical trend within Islam, has been repeatedly invoked by different actors in the conflicting process of defining Pakistan's cultural and political identity. As early on as the reformist Mohammed Iqbal[1], who reinterpreted it in a more dynamic idiom able to inspire and mobilize the Indian Muslim community in the 1930's, Sufism has naturally become part of the ideologization of Islam in Pakistan and hence of the language of Muslim symbolic politics. In the 1930's, Iqbal started defining his idea of Muslim nationalism. His contribution to the formation of the Indian Muslims' collective consciousness seems unequalled (Malik 2005, ix). In his eyes, the reform of Islam must have socio-political aims: his goals are to restore the dynamism of Islam, to exhume its original truths in order to reconstruct the great Islamic concepts and reconnect them with their initial universality. He tried to redefine the role of Sufism in the modern world in order to achieve his reformist and modernist mission. Since then, Sufism has often been tapped as a political resource and instrumentalized as a legitimizing tool by both state and non state actors. As the contested "mystical" aspect of faith, its very definition has become increasingly the locus of arguments within the Pakistani public sphere. But delineating it only as the mystical trend within Islam does not enable one to understand the more social and political dimensions of this diverse phenomenon. Given the "polyphonic" heritage (Bruinessen and Day Howell 2007, 14) and

[1] A poet and a philosopher, he is considered as the main designer of the idea of Pakistan and as the spiritual father of the country.

the great hermeneutic plasticity of Sufism, it seems best here to use the word in a descriptive way to avoid getting trapped in one ideological discourse or another.

However, ever since the awakening of Muslim self-consciousness in the 18th and 19th centuries which gave rise to various movements of reformism, Sufism, in Pakistan as elsewhere, has played an *ambivalent* role in the Islamic revival. A rhetoric of decline, decadence and at times, downright condemnation, long dominated the public discourse on "Sufism", and particularly concerning the system of meaning and practices centred around shrines and *pirs* (the Sufi saints and their much criticized descendants), and still more specifically the cult of the saints, whose sanctity had been naturalized in popular culture. But analyzing the harsh criticisms on Sufism and *pirs* only as a doctrinal position would probably be incomplete. Indeed, if there is rivalry between competing interpretations of Islam, the issue seems also to revolve around the stakes of competing authorities searching for popular legitimacy, and attempting to constitute their own clientele. Carl Ernst has rightly pointed out that whereas the controversy is formulated in a doctrinal language, the struggle is actually a political one (Ernst 2000, 79). If the Islamists, among others, have often identified Sufis as their "enemies", it might also be because the latter have been some of the most powerful institutional actors within Muslim societies and hence some of their most potent rivals in their bid to reform the sociopolitical order.

Sufism has thus gradually emerged as a newly disputed category and was largely constructed in academic as well as public discourse as antithetical to Islamism, understood as the emergence of new forms of organizations using Islam both as a political ideology and as a religion (Roy 1992). Many in Pakistan deplore the fact that "Sufi Islam", which for the majority constitutes the matrix of the subcontinent's Muslim identity, has been gradually eclipsed by more "fundamentalist" versions of Islamic faith averse to the mystical trends, such as Abu Ala Mawdudi's Islamist party, the Jama'at-e Islami. In the context of the war on terror in which Pakistan has played an ambiguous role as a front-line State since 2001, the universe of Sufism, deeply embedded in Pakistan's ethos, has come to be seen as the natural symbolic ally of power and been promoted as an alternative to counter the "forces of extremism". However, the Pakistani State does not hold the monopoly of the interpretation of Sufism. For this heavily charged signifier encompasses doctrines, forms of organization as well as practices performed by actors belonging to the whole of the political spectrum- including the Islamist field. As a matter of fact, the hegemonic "Sufi Islam versus fundamentalist Islam" narrative appears to be just one ideology among others once confronted with the complexity of Sufi politics in Pakistan.

Within the Islamist field, where all actors are fighting for the setting up of an Islamic State, doctrinal positions on Sufism are ambivalent and range from enthusiastic acceptance to complete rejection. The movement which has the most loudly trumpeted its affiliation with the Sufi identity is the Barelwi movement. Often overlooked by scholars, this theological school was founded in the 19th century by the scholar and Sufi Ahmed reza Khan Barelwi (1856-1921), and is often presented as a form of traditionalist reaction to more reformist movements (mainly Deobandi and Ahl-e Hadith) critical of some contentious aspects of Sufism. If the rhetorical and doctrinal conflicts between contending sectarian groups in the Indian subcontinent could be interpreted in the 19th century less as a sign of the division of the Muslim community than as one

of "a substantial homogeneity among Muslims » (Metcalf 1982, 358), a different interpretation seems necessary today. The doctrinal conflicts between Barelwis, Deobandis and Ahl-e hadith are indeed not new. But their scope has gradually broadened and has given way to mobilization on the basis of religious identities which have endorsed a political function. The different groups of the Barelwi movement stigmatize other Sunni sects as being deviant religious "minorities" who are responsible for "terrorism" and are patronized by the State. While claiming to be the representatives of majority Sufi Islam (the cult of Sufi saints and of the Prophet), they feel they have paradoxically become a political minority. And in the framework of an Ideological State such as Pakistan, created in the name of Islam, the leaders of this movement deem that their being "representative" of the religiosity of the population should translate into a hegemonic situation in the political field. This has not been the case and this paradox highlights the complexity of the articulation between religion and politics in Pakistan.

This article is an attempt at articulating the study of two modes of Islamic expression and mobilization which are often deemed as antagonistic: Islamism and Sufism. Over the last thirty years, Islamism has been one of the main objects of scrutiny for political scientists to the detriment of the role of the Sufi orders, whose importance in the Islamic revival has generally been overlooked. Hence, Islamism, which designates the advent of new organizations and mobilizations using Islam generally to build a political project for an Islamic State, has long been construed as a category antinomic to that of Sufism. But Sufi orders have actually often been called on to fuel other forms of mobilization, including Islamism. Furthermore, if interactions[2] have indeed been noticed between Sufism and Islamism, it seems important to sharpen our understanding of these various and often invisible interactions, especially in the framework of a State where the religious, political and identity referents are tightly intertwined. I have hence coined the concept "*Sufislamism"* in order to designate such groups, like Barelwis, claiming Sufism and Sufi identity as a register for Islamist mobilization. Besides enabling an enhanced analysis of the various interactions between Sufism and Islamism, this concept may also improve our understanding of the highly fissile politicization of the doctrinal fractures inside the Islamist field in Pakistan, thus helping to chart the deep waters of identity politics, especially those of what it appears relevant to categorize as "intra-Sunni sectarianism". Sufism has taken on an ideological dimension among new organizations formalizing their doctrinal difference in order to transform their specific religious identity into a political resource and a sectarian stance.

I will start my analysis by a quick history of the politicization of Barelwis in Pakistan. Created in 1948 immediately after partition to protect and promote Barelwi doctrine and institutions and take part in the political process, the Jamiyyat-e Ulama-e Pakistan (JUP) has remained the Barelwi actor of reference until the 1980's and has gradually asserted itself inside the Islamist field, by becoming increasingly oppositional and by gaining more seats in the 1970's in the As-

[2] Hassan Al Banna, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Abu Ala Mawdudi, the founder of the Pakistani Jama'at-e Islami and Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine, the founder of the Moroccan al adl wal al ihsan, were all initiated into Sufism, before being brought to establish an arm's length relationship with the latter in an ambivalent way.

sembly than other Islamist parties. In the 1980s, the proliferation of new Barelwi organizations accompanied the rising tensions among sectarian groups. The Sufi/anti-Sufi controversy has hence survived until today, but has become politicized and has even triggered the radicalization of religious identities, notably since the 1980's under the Islamists-friendly regime of Zia ul Haq (1977-1988). The Barelwis were politically stigmatized on the basis of their religious beliefs. But beyond theological rhetoric, it seems that extra-religious grounds have been at stake. Indeed, the analysis of the factors of the reassertion and proliferation of Barelwi groups is complex. In the process, Sufism began to play an even more central role in the construction of the Barelwi identity, through apologetic and polemical literature but also by opting for violent modes of action and reaction. This is notably the case of one radical Barelwi group, the Sunni Tehreek. This group, along with others from the Barelwi sect, since May 2009, has taken the initiative of a campaign to "save Pakistan" from talibanization with the blessings of the government. The most recent developments of the "the War against Terror" thus highlight the politicization of Sufism in Pakistan: both a social and political mobilization for a cause, but also the manipulation of this same cause and the cooptation of its defenders by the State. In the framework of the "War against Terror", mainly targeting Deobandi and Ahl-e Hadith groups, the Barelwis have finally accessed to political recognition and earned legitimization from the powers that be. The latter are using sectarian dynamics to underpin and give teeth to their fight against "the root of evil[3] », that is to say Taliban and Al Qaeda. In the official narrative portraying the current war as an ideological conflict between "moderate" and "extremist" forces within Islam, the Barelwis have indeed been identified as falling into the first of these categories.

2. The factors of the barelwi renewal and of intra-Sunni sectarianism in the 1980's

There are three main Sunni political parties in Pakistan: the Jama'at-e Islami (JI), the Deobandi Jamiyyat-e Ulama-e Islam (JUI), and the Barelwi Jamiyyat-e Ulama-e Pakistan (JUP). Soon after the creation of Pakistan, the different interpretations on the role of Islam expressed themselves in the rivalry between the modernist or secular elite, and the Islamists and oulamas (experts on Islamic law). The latter naturally wanted to take part in the constitutional debate and the State apparatus. Religious parties soon demanded that the State institutions be founded on the Coran, the Tradition of the Prophet (*sunna*) and the Islamic law (charia). But despite sharing these common grounds of establishing an Islamic State, they diverged on doctrinal issues. The

[3] This expression has been used by Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari to designate Beitullah Mehsud, defunct leader of the Pakistan Taliban Movement. . This young Pashtoun militant, who was killed in a drone attack in August 2009 in South Waziristan, had quickly become the number one public enemy of Pakistan, and the US offered a 5 million dollars reward for his capture. He was considered as the Pakistani relay and local ally of Al Qaeda.

latter never had big political consequences apart from making any alliance between the groups difficult and from discrediting religious parties in the eyes of the population.

The JUP was founded in 1948 right after partition. If Barelwis are usually perceived as more "tolerant" than other religious trends, their political expression within JUP displays a very orthodox and rigorist religious ideology, as well as a political one that is very similar to other Islamist parties. At the same time, it is linked to Sufi orders and *pirs* who fill the ranks of the party leadership and the JUP has succeeded in using their rituals and "drama" to address the masses and gain political and religious supporters (Malik 1990, 43). The concept of Nizam-e Mustafa, the system of the Prophet, is a central one in the political thought of Barelwis. This system works as a mythical order originating in the golden age of the beginning of Islam, and it includes more than just worship: it shows the necessity to politicize Islam within the community of believers[4]. According to Shah Ahmed Nurani, the leader of JUP from 1973 up to his death in 2003, the Nizam-e Mustafa can solve all the problems of the country and is nothing less than the "destiny" of Pakistan which can prevent secularism from putting down roots[5]. Until the 1970s, the JUP remained mainly a religious pressure group wanting to make of Pakistan a "true" Islamic State and supporting the powers that be during elections. In the 1970s, the party asserted itself as a noticeable political force, especially in the first free and fair elections of 1970, and Nurani gradually became one of the most vocal and popular leaders of the opposition. The JUP remained in the opposition after the coming to power of General Zia-ul Haq in 1977 and lost many a members throughout the 1980s by keeping the same uncompromising position towards the regime. Confronted with the intellectual hegemony of the Deobandis and Ahl-e Hadith since the rise to power of General Zia-ul Haq, who promoted a top-down re-islamization by favoring their version of Islam, the leaders of the JUP quickly realized the risk of religious and political marginalization they incurred in the new political landscape marked by complex internal, regional and international play of forces.

From the beginning of the 80's, Barelwi leaders have tried to initiate a spiritual and political renewal of their theological school. A notable differentiation took place within the movement. Their degree of politicization, protestation and radicalization has been markedly variable. The first two organizations to have successfully launched into such an undertaking have been the Minhaj-ul Quran founded in 1981 in Lahore by the Sufi and scholar Tahir-ul Qadri and the Dawat-e Islami founded in 1984 in Karachi by Mohammad Ilyas Qadri. Both were at first strictly religious. According to Khaled Ahmed, Pakistani society had gotten weary of the extremism and Puritanism of some religious organizations and was willing to revert to a more tolerant form of Islam, inspired by the ideals of Sufism (Ahmed 2000). This analysis cannot apply to all Barelwi groups and seems to ignore the fact that, among the latter, the proverbial tolerance of Sufism is not always manifest. Moreover, all the Pakistani Sufis do not adhere to the identity politics of the Barelwi mobilization. These organizations doubtlessly benefit from the support and the ac-

[4] Interview with Qari Bahadur Zawar, general secretary of JUP, Lahore, April 2007.

[5] *Nida-e Ahl-e Sunnat*, Februrary 2002, p.42

tive commitment of numerous *pirs* and their disciples, but they have not succeeded in mobilizing the totality of the Sufi orders in their movement, which is in itself fragmented and prone to competition and conflict.

Towards the twilight of the 1970's, structural changes in the balance of powers in Pakistan have created conditions for new identifications. Most of them were not new but have been subject to a new form of politicization and even radicalization. The chiite mobilization has been the most widely studied, along with that of the Mohajirs[6]. Such identity politics as flourished in the 1980's was largely determined, as it is elsewhere, by the structure of political opportunities: resources, institutional configurations and public policies which have facilitated (or hindered) the development of protest movements (Kitschelt 1986, 58). The tactics of the Pakistani State towards religion favored the rise of sectarianism and jihadism. It was undoubtedly under Zia-ul Haq's military regime (1977-1988) that Islamism underwent an unprecedented mobilization and became gradually sectarian under the aegis of the Pakistani military Intelligence, the infamous Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). An opportunity opened for the regime to patronize some Deobandi and Ahl-e Hadith religious groups, but also to strengthen institutional ties which ended up legitimizing those groups (Shafqat 202, 134). Generously funded by the US and Saudi Arabia, the jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet troops became the Islamist cause above all else. The Pakistani Jama'at-e Islami received funds and acted as a relay for the Afghan Hezb-e islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. As an ideological and financial supporter of the jihad, the Saudi monarchy pressurized the Pakistani military establishment not to allow Shiites and Barelwis to participate, even though the latter would by no means have spurned active collaboration. This marginalization had religious grounds: Sufis and Shiites display beliefs and practices which are condemned by Wahhabism. At the end of the jihad against the Soviets in the late 1980's, active jihadi groups in Afghanistan were redirected towards a new front in Kashmir. The ISI and the army still excluded Barelwis and Shiites, even though among the first groups to have started jihad there were Barelwis, such as the Tehreek-e Jihad or Al-Barq[7].

Hence, it was to be mainly under the regime of Zia that the differing conceptions of the Muslim political community, and the foundational role of Islam, became conflicting. The President General promoted a "legalist" version of Islam against the syncretism of the widespread Sufi traditions. He tried to found the State on a single hegemonic ideology, clashing head-on with regional diversity and religious pluralism.

Another important factor of the Barelwi mobilization corresponds to its material, symbolic and human resources which also help in explaining its emergence. The organizations, as key operators in channeling means for protest, constitute major resources for mobilization. This is also the case of the leaders of the movement, whose availability, as well as that of their supporters', is a fundamental input in the success of the mobilization. Generally speaking, the activists venerate their charismatic leader who embodies the group's ideals. He inspires love and respect, is

[6] Mohajirs are those Muslims who migrated from India to Pakistan during partition in 1947.

[7] Interview with Amir Rana, Director of the Institute of Peace Studies, July 2009, Islamabad.

a catalyst for commitment, and facilitates the identification of militants with their cause. Shaped on the model of the brotherhood, each of these Barelwi organizations displays a collective identity which can be encapsulated as an all-exclusive tie of loyalty and an allegiance towards a single authority on whom strongly positive emotions converge. The movement as a whole also benefits from strong social and religious networks comprising thousands of mosques and shrines covering the whole Pakistani territory. The preexisting networks of solidarity influence the structure of the mobilization which has succeeded in capturing them (Oberschall 1973) for its own benefit.

3. Claims and identity construction of the Barelwi movement

> Can we put an end to this war ? », asks the leader of Sunni Tehreek in one of his pamphlets dating back to the 1990's. "This war is in every house. This war is against the Ahl-e Sunnat, the Deobandis and the Wahhabis. (…) They insult Allah, the Prophet, and they do not respect the Sufi saints. (…) How can we take these people back on the right track? These people are not looking for forgiveness. Now you have to decide who you stand with: us or them[8].

Even if it displays an aggressive tone that is not shared by all the groups, this excerpt illustrates the perception of the Barelwi actors in general: the "enemies" are clearly identified, as well as some of the main grievances. The identification of the enemies of a movement is a key procedure in defining its identity and establishing the Us/Them frontier. Among the Barelwis, the frontier is not really contested, even if the conflicts between the different Barelwi groups do not necessarily vanish before the danger represented by the "Wahhabis". In the Barelwi view, all those who do not belong to their school of thought are outside the frontiers of Sunnism, the main branch of Islam. In their rhetoric, the word Sunni and the expression Ahl-e Sunnat wal Jamaat[9] are only used to designate those adhering to the religious interpretation of Ahmad Reza Khan Barelwi, the founder of the movement. As Usha Sanyal has rightly pointed out, the expression Ahl-e Sunnat wal Jamaat emphasizes both the Tradition (*sunna*) of the prophet and the majority religious community. The Barelwis make a great use of it, highlighting a "universalist claim linking its pretenders to the Sunnite world beyond the subcontinent » (Sanyal 1996, 166), and a way of denying this link to other Muslims who do not respect the norms of Ahmad Reza. Hence, are excluded from Sunnism all the groups perceived as « Wahhabis » such as the Deobandis and Ahl-e Hadith (Sanyal 1996, 247). The Deobandis belong to a school which cannot be likened to Wahhabism, unlike the Ahl-e Hadith who do not recognize the four schools of jurisprudence. Nevertheless, the Barelwis consider them as such, even though Usha Sanyal finds contradictions in Ahmad Reza's writings on this specific topic.

[8] Mohammad Saleem Qadri, *Akhar Ye Jang Kyun ?* (Why this war?), available in the online library of ST, http://www.sunnitehreek.com.pk/st/books/library/jang_kiuoon/o.php.

[9] Literally « the people of the Tradition of the prophet and of the community of believers ».

However, despite a clear identification of their opponents, the main Barelwi organizations fall within the framework of a strong ambivalence with their "Wahhabi" counterparts. The rejection of their rivals does not prevent Barelwis to borrowing from them some of its most significant features. As Jean-François Bayart has pointed out: "antagonism and rejection can be means to appropriate the mental categories, the values, the institutions of the opponent » (Bayart 1996, 168). The Dawat-e Islami has asserted itself as the Barelwi counterpart of the Deobandi Tablighi Jama'at, one of the biggest Islamic preaching movements in the world. The efficient organizational model of the Jama'at-e Islami has been emulated by the Minhaj-ul Quran which has reproduced it. The reformist positions of Tahir-ul Qadri are such that he has been marginalized by other Barelwi groups and is often presented as the "Mawdudi of the Barelwis". The radical modes of action displayed by Sunni Tehreek are also a novelty among barelwis and have made it a valid foil to the most sectarian "Wahhabi" groups. Finally, all the Barelwi groups are located in urban centers and can compete directly with their rivals. All mostly recruit among the urban middle-classes.

The claims of the Barelwi movement make it similar to a movement in quest of recognition. But it is also a "status movement » (Gusfield 1896) whose stakes are to protect the consideration and the social status that the group thinks it deserves, both as the majority sect of the country, but also because its leaders actively participated in the nationalist movement for the creation of Pakistan, unlike other sects, for instance the Deobandis believing mostly in composite nationalism with Hindus. In 1945, thousands of Barelwi Sufis and scholars gathered in Benares in the framework of the All India Sunni League and officially offered their support to nationalist leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The Barelwi mobilization hence aims at "righting the wrongs" in a rather defensive or reactive way. This is notably the case for the 2006 attack in Karachi, which took place during the celebration of the birth of the Prophet and constituted the biggest blow ever struck against the Barelwis and even, at that time, the biggest attack in Pakistan for two decades. More than 60 Barelwis died and justice has not yet been done. The Barelwis also demand that the government seizes and forbids all "bad" books written against them and that it help Ahl-e Sunnat to regain all the Barelwi mosques supposedly stolen by "Wahhabis". The Sunni Tehreek considers that other sectarian groups illegally occupy places of worship. This « politics of mosques » (Ansari 2001) has entailed extremely violent confrontation between ST and other sectarian groups, be they Deobandi or Ahl-e Hadith. The mosques have hence become for ST the symbolic markers of an endangered religious identity, the escheating sacred territories of "real Islam" that have to be defended at the risk of one's life. This also applies in the case of religious schools (madrasas) and shrines. The government has been asked to restitute the Sufi shrines nationalized since 1959 under Ayub Khan's regime (1959-1968), to their legitimate owners. Some Barelwi leaders perceived the creation of the ministry of pious works (*awqaf*) in 1960 as a « conspiracy », expressing the will to "occupy the shrines », seen henceforth as "under foreign occupation". The movement also demands resources claimed by other groups (which Charles Tilly would call a "competitive" position) by demanding similar job opportunities within the military and civilian bureaucracies as those held by Deobandis. The Barelwis also perceive the educational and media platforms of diffusion of their school of

thought as having been reduced. Hence, they demand to the government for an increase in the legitimate space devoted to publicizing their beliefs and practices. However, the "proactive" or offensive register seems absent, as the mobilization does not seem to be claiming for specific rights which have not been recognized or exercised before (Tilly 1976).

In their self-representation, the Barelwis identify themselves with the « authentic » Sufis, a quality they deny to other sects. "It means some groups are not the original Ahl-e Sunnat, they are Wahhabis, like in Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Abdul Wahhab Nejdi. The Ahl-e Sunnat are the followers of Sufism[10]. » If the organizations of the Barelwi renewal are actively involved in the defense of a Sufi identity, the logics of the mobilization have indeed provoked a reification of piety, of beliefs and of Islamic practices by objectifying them as loci of self-analysis, repertoire of action or symbols. In a logics of differentiation from other Islamic movements and following the line of Ahmed Reza Khan, the Barelwi movement has succeeded in mobilizing religious values and representations centered around the Prophet and the Sufi saints who have contributed to the imagination of a community on the basis of a widely shared minimal code. The veneration of the Prophet and of Sufi saints has always been a central feature of Sufi doctrine. As self-proclaimed "lovers of the Prophet", the actors of the Barelwi mobilization authoritatively appropriate the figure of the Prophet as the main identity symbol and supreme religious authority, and claim that they love and respect him more than the "Wahhabis" do. For Ahmad Reza Khan, the prophet was so close to God that he had almost replaced the latter as the subject of devotion (Sanyal 1996, 164), and passionate love (*ishq*) for him became the true center of Barelwi faith (Ahmed 1996, 29). Numerous miracles are attributed to him and they are often recalled during the massive celebrations organized to commemorate his birth (*mehfil-e milad*). Similar celebrations are traditionally organized to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Sufi saints (*'urs*), and these two repertoires of action provide the Barelwis with the means to assert their identity, all the more that they are considered to be innovations by "Wahhabi" groups.

As a matter of fact, there is a significant literature in Urdu, Arabic and even English language on the doctrinal differences between the sects. Sufi beliefs and practices constitute a main focus of the debates, which are often harsh. As Carl Ernst has analyzed it, publications on Sufism have brought a change in the tradition by allowing its followers to defend it and refute attacks against it. Hence, Sufism is discussed in the public sphere as "one ideology alongside others » (Ernst 2000, 220). Barelwis often adopt an apologetic and even controversial tone in their writings, which play an important role in the construction of their identity.

[10] Interview with Pir Afzal Qadri, *amir* of the Barelwi group Almi Tanzeem Ahl-e Sunnat, May 2008, Mararian Sharif, Gujrat.

4. The Sunni Tehreek, the «radical face of Barelwis»[11]

The Barelwi leaders define Sufism as the tolerant aspect of Islam and present themselves as pacificists who have never been responsible for the violence plaguing Pakistan. As a matter of fact, the majority of Pakistani radical groups, whether sectarian or jihadis, are not Barelwi. Apart from some jihadi groups in Kashmir and some militant ones in the tribal areas, the Sunni Tehreek is probably the only instance of a massively militarized organization among Barelwis. Hence, the Wahhabis are denounced as the "real culprits", the only actors of the current wave of "terrorism". The Sufi identity is therefore claimed as a major discriminatory criterion between "them" and "us". Following this vision, Sufis belonging to other schools are considered to be impostors, pretending to be Sufis but cooperating with other sectarian and jihadi groups as well as with Taliban and Al Qaeda. Conversely, the leaders of Sunni Tehreek appeal to their Sufi identity to clear their name of « Wahhabi terrorism », despite radical modes of action. Hence, their violence is portrayed as a defensive or a reactive one: "The Sunni Tehreek is not a terrorist organization. We are the followers of the Sufis, we have never been terrorists in the past and never will be in the future. We are peace-loving people. We simply protect our religion and our mosques[12]."

The ST was created in 1990 in Karachi by Saleem Qadri and its official aim is to defend « practically » the Barelwi school. This aim first implies defending the mosques which belong to the Barelwi sect. The sectarian dimension of this group is detectable in its very name : the Sunni Movement, "Sunni" meaning « Barelwi », as explained above. In the ST, the paranoid world vision is centered on the sectarian affiliation. It is a group that has been recently placed under surveillance in the context of the "War against Terror ». It is involved in the urban guerilla in Karachi both against « Wahhabi » groups and against the secular Mohajir party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, an organization which is perceived by the ST as the invisible hand behind the bomb attack that killed its whole leadership in February 2006, along with 60 other people.

Saleem Qadri was not educated in a Barelwi mosque and was not a religious scholar. Generally speaking, the group is not comprised of many religious scholars. Laymen identifying with the Barelwis form the majority of its militants. The three successive leaders of the ST, Saleem Qadri, Abbas Qadri and Serwat Qadri, were businessmen and were the disciples of the leader of Dawat-e Islami, Ilyas Qadri. Hence, they all belong to the Qadiriyya Sufi Order.

Before being directed towards one of the three branches of the organization, each new member of ST first benefits from a general formation bordering on indoctrination, where he has to listen to the numerous speeches of the leader (also known as "the voice of the Ahl-e Sunnat") in cassettes form. Then, the profile of the member is assessed and he is sent to one of the

[11] I borrow this expression to Arif Jamal, interview, April 2006, Lahore.

[12] Interview with Mohammad Shaheed Ghaury, a member of the central executive committee of ST, May 2008, Islamabad.

departments. The latter are three: politics, welfare and preaching (*tabligh*). The preaching section educates members in religious matters: they take Kuranic lessons, get to know the commentaries of the Koran (*tafsir*), and study its translation into Urdu. They help organize religious events such as the celebration of the birth of the Prophet (*milad-e mustapha)*, or gatherings for religious causes such as *Tahafuz namuz-i risalat*, the protection of the prestige of the prophet. "The Jews and the Christians insult our Prophet a lot. They write literature against our religion, and they make caricatures. We want to put an end to these things, and if we have to make use of force, we are ready to give our lives for that[13]. » The preaching department also proposes fifteen days of religious education at the provincial and city levels.

The Welfare department is constituted by the Service committee (*khidmat*), which is located in the premises of the headquarters of ST in Karachi. It operates thanks to the compulsory almsgiving (*zakat)* and the charity of the Ahl-e Sunnat, but also, as is the case of numerous other Islamic charities, thanks to the sale of the leather from animals sacrificed during the religious feast of '*eid*. This committee takes care of orphans, has created a computer Institute, has founded religious schools (madrasas) to educated poor children, and has built a hospital in Karachi. The committee also pays for the dowry of future brides, distributes wheat and rice to the poor, and is planning to build a library.

From a social and religious movement, ST then attempted to become a political party. In 2002, its leadership decided to participate in the general elections in Karachi in order to "serve the Ahl-e Sunnat, even in politics[14] ». In this perspective, the will to "change the system of the country" is thought possible only through "the power of the ballots[15] ». If the manifesto of the party aims at establishing a "true Islamic Welfare State" and wants to promote "national harmony" and "brotherhood" among people, it will not compromise on the "ideology of Pakistan", on the foundation of which "all Muslims are considered as a nation". All the laws contradicting this ideology will be amended or nullified. And even if the manifesto aims at working for "harmony", it also aims at protecting "the real faith and real Islamic rights", that is to say those of the Ahl-e Sunnat. "All the anti-Islamic forces leading people astray » (Dawn 2002) will be combated, and one can easily identify these "forces" as being « Wahhabis ».

The founder Saleem Qadri perceived the political dimension of the plight of Barelwis in Pakistan and wanted to commit more actively, and more violently, in the defense of his school of thought. That is the main change carried out by the ST in the way of thinking of Barelwis, perceived up to the creation of ST by Qadri and his followers as too accommodating, and too unconscious of the real danger of disappearance threatening them. As explained by a cadre:

> The Ahl-e Sunnat thought: 'if someone occupies our mosques, it doesn't matter, we will build new ones'. But this is not the solution. The ST thinks that those who occupy our mosques and our shrines

[13] Brochure on the « aims of ST », literature internal to the organization.

[14] Interview with Alvi Haider, May 2008, Pindi.

[15] Open letter of Serwat Ejaz Qadri.

can change people's ideology[16]. » Hence, the ST is a group on the defensive, ready to sacrifice for "the rights of the Ahl-e Sunnat". "The main difference between Sunni Tehreek and other Barelwi groups is that we defend all the groups which are only doing preaching. We preach but we also defend the Ahl-e Sunnat. Wherever Ahl-e Sunnat groups or people need us, we go[17].

In an "open letter" to his followers[18], Saleem Qadri expresses his ambition to mobilize more people to confront the « enemies » and save future generations from the disappearance of their school of thought. Qadri resorts to the Prophet, who is venerated by the Barelwis, in order to justify the future expansion of his organization and to galvanize his readers:

> If we don't do anything, these people [the Wahhabis] will win against us and will change the young generations. When I see these things, my heart bleeds. We are facing numerous problems so, my friends, wake up! If one suffers, he cannot sleep. If I have the power, I will wake all of you up. In this predicament, I need people who are willing to give their lives and I need brave people who can solve these problems by force. Those who are ready to sacrifice their lives must create problems to these people and threaten them. My brothers, if we love the Prophet and are his servants, then we will open our movement to the whole world to lighten it up and we will preach concerning our school. I pray God that He gives us a chance. We will take our responsibilities in the right path and will defend our school from our enemies. We will also defend those who are led astray. So that in the Day of Judgment, we will be able to give answers to God and the Prophet.

The emotional dimension of Qadri's commitment is detectable in the rhetoric he uses. "My heart bleeds" is an expression often repeated by militants when they explain what has determined them to commit themselves in the Sunni tehreek. Their discourses are generally a paraphrase of Saleem Qadri, a complaint stricken by the emotionalism of victimization. *"I wanted to become a member of ST after hearing the speeches of Saleem Qadri. My heart softened for ST[19]. »* The group has resources at its disposal which have seduced potential recruits: the radicalism of its intentions and of its modes of action, as well as the absolute commitment of its militants, ready to die for the cause of the Ahl-e Sunnat.

In 2001, Saleem Qadri was killed in an attack which provoked riots in the already unstable city of Karachi. Hundreds of young Barelwis, some of them masked, poured into the streets soon after Qadri's death was announced, they set on fire and threw stones at cars (Ansari 2001). Qadri's funerals gathered a huge crowd, the biggest of the kind for a very long time (20000 people according to official sources, 30000 according to journalistic sources). It pointed out the growing importance of a phenomenon that had so far gone rather unnoticed: the great capacity for mobilization of Barelwi groups. The ST ended up with a martyr, who empowered the group to strengthen the cause of Barelwis (Rana 2004, 376). In an open letter to the Ahl-e

[16] Interview with Alvi Haider, May 2008, Pindi.
[17] *Ibid*.
[18] Literature internal to the organization.
[19] Interview with Alvi Haider, May 2008, Pindi.

Sunnat, Abbas Qadri, the successor of Saleem Qadri who also died in the 2006 attack in Karachi, presents the martyrdom of the founder of ST as an enviable destiny, as an ideal for every militant to emulate in order to exterminate the "enemies":

> The Sunni Tehreek counts many martyrs, especially our leader Saleem Qadri. These people are lovers of the prophet. These people are brave, they have walked in front of Wahhabis and Deobandis with defiance (…). Even if an enemy of Ahl-e Sunnat is alive, we are ready to fight with him until death. (…)You have to work hard to reach the aim of our martyred amir (leader). We have to complete his mission, and work night and day. Let us pray that God will defend us and will help us to complete our mission so that we can recover our rights[20].

5. The convergence between the Barelwi mobilization and the State against the talibanization of Pakistan

The Sunni Tehreek is not exactly what one might objectively call a "moderate" group. However, it has been mentioned by the Pakistan's Foreign minister, the hereditary *pir* from Multan Shah Mehmud Qureishi, at the very start of the military operation against the Taliban in May 2009, in order to officially announce during the '*urs* of the Sufi saint Shah Rukn-e Alam the mobilization of the Barelwis against the "talibanization" of the country (The News 2009). Several meetings organized by the government had already taken place with the leaders of ST and other Barelwi groups to encourage the latter to take the lead of a social movement against the insurgents of the Swat valley, in the North of the country[21], belonging to the Taliban Movement of Pakistan (Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan)[22] and suspected of being close to Al Qaeda. The militants wanted to impose a judicial system founded on Islamic law, the charia. The day following Qureishi's speech, the first demonstration of Sunni Tehreek in Peshawar took place, which was then followed by the launching of the campaign "Save Pakistan" by Barelwi forces, just before a Barelwi alliance was formed.

Feeling threatened in their very existence by the Taliban phenomenon, the Ahl-e Sunnat leaders have tried to organize themselves in a common platform to forward their views. The Taliban insurrection in the North has hence allowed the convergence of Barelwi sectarian inter-

[20] Propaganda literature of ST.

[21] Interview with Rasul Bakhsh Rais, professor in political science at LUMS University, July 2009, Islamabad.

[22] The genesis of this movement goes back to 2003, when the first intrusions of Pakistani army in the tribal areas took place to hunt the Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda militants. But it is in 2007 that the movement really came to light as an identifiable entity, under the leadership of Beitullah Mehsud. The radical circles in Pakistan seem to be a multi-organizational field comprised of dozens of more or less autonomous groups (Pashtouns, Penjabi and foreign militants) but they share common strategic, financial or even ideological interests.

ests and those of the government and of the military establishment. The latter have indeed committed themselves in a harsh statement of propaganda to make the Pakistani nation accept a military operation bent on exterminating a few thousand armed militants and causing the displacement of more than 3 million people.

Since the start of the "War on Terror", which triggered a process of radicalization among mainly Deobandi and Ahl-e Hadith groups, sectarianism between Sunnis has grown increasingly violent. The Taliban Movement of Pakistan is Deobandi and promotes a version of Islam which is extremely hostile to the Barelwis who are considered as *mushirk*[23]. Since 2005, the Sufi shrines have been more specifically targeted by anti-Sufi militants, and such has been the case of Barelwi scholars. The 12th of June 2009, the Barelwi mufti Sarfraz Naeemi, the director of a madrasa in Lahore, was killed in a suicide attack claimed by Beitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Taliban Movement of Pakistan. From Bernard Kouchner to Barak Obama, condemnations were unanimous. The ex Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, among many others, deplored a "national tragedy". A harsh opponent to the Taliban and the author of a fatwa condemning suicide attacks as being "un-Islamic", Naeemi had become a target for those he denounced as "the enemies of Islam and of Pakistan". Indeed, he supported the government and the military operation in Swat. After his death, he became a martyr, the symbol of a "modern", "moderate" and "tolerant" Islam that Pakistan had to defend to confront the "terrorist" threat. The unusual agitation provoked by Naeemi's death in official circles is yet another clear sign of the political change of perception of the government towards Barelwi actors, who were long marginalized. As explained by Naeemi's son, "these days, the government has a soft corner for Barelwis[24] ». This opinion seems to be shared by numerous observers, all agreeing on the fact that the support of the government to Barelwis is not only a rhetoric, even though the precise nature of official "encouragements" (funds, ammunition?) remains difficult to assess[25]. However, the institutional signs of an official cooptation of Barelwis are plentiful. As early as November 2008, just two months after the coming to office of the new government led by the Pakistan People's Party, a prominent Barelwi leader, Syed Hamid Syed Kazmi, was appointed federal minister for religious affairs, succeeding to Ejaz-ul Haq, Zia's son. Kazmi quickly mobilized his networks in the Barelwi circles in order to support the government's policies. The minister appointed Hajji Hanif Tayyab, the leader of the Barelwi party Nizam-e Mustafa and a disciple of Kazmi's father, as the new president of the Sufi Council. This body seems to be more than just a resurrection of the National Sufi Council founded during general president Musharraf's regime (1999-2008) to

[23] This expression designate people associating partners to God, a practice qualified as *shirk*.

[24] Interview with Raghib Naeemi, July 2009, Islamabad.

[25] Interview with Rasul Bakhsh Rais, professor of political science at LUMS University, July 2009, Islamabad ; Interview with Amir Rana, director of the Institute of Peace Studies, July 2009, Islamabad ; Interview with Rifat Hussain, professor at the University of Quaid-e Azzam and director of the department of defense and strategic studies, July 2009, Islamabad ; Interview with Muhammad Nadeem, journalist and researcher at the Institute of Islamic Research, July 2009, Islamabad.

promote the mystical trend of Islam in order to find a legitimizing tool the better to confront the "terrorist threat". At the time of its creation, the Council had been lauded by foreign officials in Pakistan but was subject to harsh criticisms from all Islamist groups. If Musharraf had tried to build Sufism as an alternative ideology to "extremism", his bid had mainly remained a rhetorical one, popularized through the media. For minister Kazmi, there has been a change of strategy since the election of the new government, and especially since 2009: "The Barelwis are encouraged by the current government who wishes to mobilize public support against Taliban. They are helped in organizing conferences, and they have the opportunity to meet with the prime minister and the president. They benefit from their moral support and they can accede more easily to jobs in the civilian bureaucracy[26]. » In August 2009, Kazmi survived an attack on his car during which his driver was killed.

At the same time, in the framework of the Taliban insurrection in Swat and the dramatic increase of suicide attacks claimed by the Taliban Movement of Pakistan as early as 2007, the Barelwi presence in the public sphere has increased. The different groups of the movement have organized many conferences and demonstrations aiming both at denouncing the "talibanization" of Pakistan and at reasserting the role of Sufis in the promotion of an Islam of "peace, love and tolerance" in contemporary Pakistan. In March 2009, a conference gathering 300 Sufis from across Pakistan organized at the headquarters of Minhaj-ul Quran in Lahore tried to elaborate measures in order to fight those actors who want to "discredit the peaceful message of the Sufis" and want to promote "anti-mysticism ideologies[27] ». In May 2009, the MUQ organized yet another convention for the "protection of Pakistan" (*Tahaffuz-e Pakistan*) in which more than 200 Barelwi Sufis and scholars participated. They adopted a highly informative communiqué highlighting the positions of Ahl-e Sunnat representatives about the most recent developments of the "War against Terror". They once again emphasized the "key role" of Sufis in "the construction of a peaceful society", in the promotion of "peace and harmony" and more generally in the propagation of Islam throughout history. Sufi shrines have been celebrated as "cultural symbols" whose recent profanation by pro-Taliban groups is only the expression of "un-Islamic actions". The "violations" of the Constitution carried out by these groups have also been condemned in the harshest terms, as well as their attacks on girls schools. According to the communiqué, gaining knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim without any gender discrimination. Islam guarantees the "respect and dignity" of women and their "practical role" in society. Suicide attacks are also strictly forbidden in Islam and are likened to "barbarian acts". The Taliban practices, such as declaring war on the army, to the security forces and to the police, or eliminating the voices of opposition, were also irrevocably condemned. The Taliban and other "terrorist" forces were not the only ones to be severely criticized. The "double standards" of intelligence agencies and of the army as well as the old "politics of dualism", consisting in officially combating extremist groups while actually manipulating them undercover for the purpos-

[26] Interview with Syed Hamid Syed Kazmi, federal minister for religious affairs, July 2009, Islamabad.
[27] http://www.minhaj.org/en.php?tid=7741

es of "strategic depth" in Afghanistan and Kashmir, have also been vehemently denounced. This communiqué rings like a "revenge" of the Barelwis, who have been marginalized since the 80s to the benefit of those who were to become the "terrorists" 20 years later.

However, as we have seen in the case of Sunni Tehreek, Barelwi actors are not all as tolerant and peaceful as they would wish to be seen in the current context. Indeed, it is a member of Sunni Tehreek who killed Salman Taseer, the Governor of Penjab, in January 2011. Taseer wanted to amend the law on blasphemy which instates the death penalty for any offender against the Prophet Muhammad, who is venerated by Barelwis. Taseer's killer, Mumtaz Qadri, is now considered a hero, a clear sign that the current radicalization of Pakistani society is not only to be blamed on the Taliban, but paradoxically also on what some might perhaps call an overzealous interpretation of certain basic Sufi tenets, like the veneration of Prophet Muhammad. During a conference in Lahore on "the protection of the prestige of the Prophet", Barelwi leaders warned the supporters of the defunct Salman Taseer that a Mumtaz qadri would be at every corner of the country to stop such displays of solidarity. "Don't associate Mumtaz with any terrorist group, they said. He is a true lover of the Holy Prophet (pbuh)" (Tanveer 2010).

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